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AUTHOR Anderson, Jim
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ABSTRACT

This study examined cultural differences among elementary school parents' perceptions of literacy learning. Ten parents from each of three sociocultural groups were interviewed about their attitudes toward emergent literacy: (1) white-collar Chinese-Canadians; (2) white-collar Euro-Canadians; and (3) blue-collar Indo-Canadians. It found that about 84 percent of Euro-Canadian parents' responses were congruent with an emergent literacy perspective, while 63 percent of the Indo-Canadian and 54 percent of the Chinese-Canadian parents' responses were congruent with such a perspective. The study also found that the Euro-Canadian and Indo-Canadian parents appeared to afford considerable importance to the social aspects of literacy, whereas the Chinese-Canadian parents did not. Most of the Chinese-Canadian parents held traditional views on literacy development, emphasizing the direct teaching of literacy skills. (Contains 28 references.) (MDM)

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Parents' Perspectives of Literacy Acquisition: A Cross Cultural Perspective

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Jim Anderson
Department of Language Education
The University of British Columbia

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Over the last several decades, research has shown that many children develop important literacy skills prior to formal instruction in school (Sulzby & Teale, 1991). Many theorists and educators have reconceptualized literacy acquisition away from a reading readiness/sub-skills model toward one which is holistic, meaning centered, and developmental and is usually referred to as *emergent literacy* (Clay, 1966). Within this view, the child is seen as "constructor of his her own literacy" (Sulzby and Teale, 1991) with the parents or significant others serving a facilitative role by engaging the child in functional literacy activities such as "writing grocery lists", reading environmental print and storybook reading.

Rasinski, Bruneau, & Ambrose (1990) point out that this view of literacy learning is having considerable impact on the way in which literacy is now taught in many classrooms. For as they suggest "...much of whole language is based upon implementing in classroom settings what parents do with their children in nurturing language and literacy" (p.11). Furthermore, some educational jurisdictions such as the Province of British Columbia, Canada have designed and implemented early literacy programs which have an emergent literacy orientation.

However, much of the research in emergent literacy has been "case studies, chronologies, and descriptions" (Adams, 1991, p. 336) conducted by "parent-academics" (Heath and Thomas, 1984, p. 51) with their own children. And as Pellegrini (1991) has pointed out, while this research accurately describes the literacy experiences of many middle-class children, it does not reflect the literacy experiences in "non-mainstream culture homes" (p.382). Furthermore, there is growing awareness that literacy acquisition is a socio-cultural phenomenon and that the meanings ascribed to literacy, the manner in which literacy is mediated, and the literacy activities in which members of a particular cultural group engage are determined by the values and beliefs held by the members of that group (Clay, 1993).

Related literature

According to DeJesus (1985), in the past educators have tended to ignore parents except for involving them in menial and trivial ways. However, because of the realization that parents **do** play an important role in their children's early literacy development, researchers are beginning to investigate how parents fulfil this role especially after children commence school. This research has tended to have two foci: (1) the literacy experiences which parents provide for their children at

home and (2) parents' perceptions of literacy learning.

For example, Rasinski, Bruneau, and Ambrose (1990) studied the literacy practices engaged in at home by children in a whole language kindergarten class. They found that the parents engaged their children in holistic activities which resembled those practices associated with whole language instruction. For as they pointed out, "...literacy in these homes is not explicitly or systematically taught." (p.11)

Bruneau, Rasinski, and Ambrose (1989) investigated the perceptions of literacy learning held by middle class and upper middle class parents whose children were in a kindergarten program which was in transition from a skills based to a whole language program. They concluded that while some of the parents preferred a skills based approach and indeed had considerable difficulty with aspects of the new program such as invented spelling, the majority of the parents were very supportive of the whole language program.

In their study of the relationships between parents' literacy level and their perceptions of emergent literacy, Fitzgerald, Spiegel & Cunningham (1991) concluded that parents with lower literacy levels held more traditional perceptions of literacy while parents with higher literacy levels held perceptions consistent with an emergent literacy view.

Anderson (1994a) investigated the perceptions of emergent literacy held by high literate middle class and upper middle class parents and unlike Fitzgerald, Spiegel and Cunningham, did not find unqualified support for an emergent literacy perspective among this group. For while some parents supported an emergent literacy perspective, others held much more traditional views. And parents tended to support some aspects of emergent literacy (e.g. reading like behaviour) much more than others (e.g. invented spelling).

Since parents continue to play an important role in their children's literacy development after school entry (Snow et al, 1991), it is timely, that researchers are beginning to study the beliefs which parents hold about literacy and how these beliefs influence the home literacy environment which parents create for their children. However, much of this research has involved parents from the "mainstream" culture (Pellegrini, 1991). Given the increasing diversity within society and the recognition of the socio-cultural nature of literacy learning, research is needed with parents from various socio-cultural groups.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of literacy learning which parents from three different cultural groups hold.

Method

The sample for this study consisted of 10 parents from each of three different cultural groups: Chinese-Canadian (white collar occupations), Euro-Canadian (white collar occupations) and Indo-Canadian (blue collar occupations) from an urban area of British Columbia. The sample was drawn from three elementary schools (Kindergarten-grade 7) hereafter referred to as schools A, B and C.

School A. Many of the approximately 200 students who attend this school come from the working class neighbourhood in which it is located. Many of the parents are recent immigrants from India. Punjabi is spoken in many of the homes and English is the second language for many of the students. Many of the parents work in relatively low paying service occupations. The ten Indo-Canadian parents came from School A.

School B is located in a middle class-upper middle class residential neighbourhood from whence most of the students come. Many of the parents are immigrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan and for more than half of the approximately 400 students, English is their second language.The school also has a French Immersion stream and while many of the French Immersion students come from the immediate neighbourhood, a considerable number come from adjacent middle class - upper middle class neighbourhoods. Many of the parents from this school are professionals or entrepreneurs. Six of the Euro-Canadian parents and four of the Chinese-Canadian parents had children attending this school

School C, located in a residential-commercial area, has approximately 270 students who come from the surrounding neighbourhood. The school population is ethnically diverse and English is the second language for more than one third of the children. Many of the parents earn good incomes working in the commercial district and service industries and perhaps would best be described as lower middle class and middle class. However, some of the children come from a housing project located in the neighbourhood and their family incomes are low. Six of the Chinese-Canadian parents and four of the Euro-Canadian parents came from school C.

The three schools followed the recently developed *Primary Program* for the province of British Columbia which reflects an emergent literacy perspective. For example, teachers were encouraged to support children's emergent literacy behaviours such a "reading like behaviour" (Holdaway, 1979) and "invented spelling" (Routman, 1993). The three schools provided some support for students for whom English is a second language and for special needs students with some students occasionally receiving individual or small group instruction in the Learning Assistance Center. However, nearly all of the students were integrated into regular classrooms for most of the day with the E.S.L. or Learning Assistance teachers providing some support in the regular classrooms. The schools were relatively well equipped, each having a school library, classroom libraries, a gymnasium, and some computers with attendant software.

All of the parents from the target groups who had children attending kindergarten through grade two in the three schools which agreed to participate were sent letters from the researcher outlining the research plan and requesting their participation in the study. Initially, it was intended to interview 25 parents at each grade level and to balance the number of subjects according to grade level. However, many parents expressed reservations about participating in the study even after being reassured about confidentiality through a follow-up telephone conversation. While the sample size was smaller than originally planned, it was decided to proceed with an exploratory study since it was believed that the parents who had came forward would provide valuable insights in an area which has not been investigated. Thus the sample was composed as follows: 11 parents of kindergarten children, 10 parents of grade one children and 9 parents of grade two children.

Each parent was interviewed either in the home or in his or her child's school using the **P**arents' **P**erceptions of **L**iteracy **L**earning **I**nterview **S**chedule (**PPLLIS**) in her or his first language (Mandarin, English, or Punjabi) by trained research assistants representing the particular cultural group.The **PPLLIS**, developed by Anderson (1992) and somewhat similar to Deford's Theoretical Orientation Profile (1978), is a 33 item interview guide. The questions focus on reading (e.g. Does a child benefit from hearing favourite stories that she has memorized read again and again?), writing (e.g. Should a child learn to print neatly the letters of the alphabet before attempting to print messages, stories, notes and so forth?) and literacy-general (e.g. Do children learn important things about reading and writing before they begin formal reading programs at school?). At the beginning of the interview prior to the administration of the **PPLLIS**, each parent

was asked the open ended question "What are the five most important things you are doing to help your child learn to read and to write?" The interviews were audiotaped and then transcribed in their entirety. The response to each question on the **PPLLIS** was coded as to its congruence/non-congruence with an emergent literacy perspective and the data were then analyzed. The responses to the open-ended question were categorized into themes according to a classification scheme developed by Anderson (in press) and then analyzed. As well, personal information such as the child's date of birth, age of siblings and languages spoken in the home were also recorded.

RESULTS

In this section, the results of Parents Perceptions of Literacy Learning Interview Schedule are reported first. These are followed by the results on the open-ended question described earlier.

Parents Perceptions of Literacy Learning Interview Schedule

[Insert table 1 about here]

Commonalities across groups. As Table 1 shows, there was unanimous support for an emergent literacy perspective on only one item (Question 8). But some aspects of emergent literacy received considerable support in all three groups. Eight or more parents ($\geq$ 80%) in each group: agreed that tracking print was an appropriate strategy for parents to use when reading to children (Question 7); accepted the concept of reading like behaviour (Question 10); saw a connection between children's scribblings and their later writing development (Question 16); concurred with the developmental nature of literacy acquisition (Question 22); and realized the significance of the social aspects of literacy learning (Questions 26-29).

However, other aspects of emergent literacy received little support across the groups. For example, in each group more than one half of the parents: did not believe that children learn to read holistically (Question 1) and would not accept a child's invented spelling (Question 19). Similarly, parents tended to believe that children need to know the letters of the alphabet and their sounds (Question 12) before they can begin to write, which of course is consistent with their perceptions of invented spelling. Parents in all groups tended to support reading readiness (Question 33), which is perhaps to be expected given the ubiquity of such materials in the marketplace.

Chinese Canadian Parents.

The individual scores on the **PPLLIS** for this group ranged from 11/33 (33% congruency) to 24/33 (73% congruency) while overall, 54% of the responses were consistent with an emergent literacy view. Anderson (1994a) found that a similar group of middle class and high literate Euro-Canadian parents generally supported an emergent literacy perspective. And whereas the high literate parents in the Fitzgerald, Spiegel & Cunningham (1991) study overwhelmingly supported holistic literacy instruction, there was considerably less support for such a perspective among these Chinese-Canadian parents.

However, the Chinese-Canadian parents unanimously supported some aspects of emergent literacy. All of the parents agreed that reading to and with children helps them learn to write (Question 24), such reciprocity, of course, being an underlying principle of a holistic or emergent literacy perspective.

Interestingly, parents were equally divided (or nearly so) on some items. Half the parents, for example, believed that children need to print neatly before attempting to compose (Question 13), a position articulated in an unequivocal manner by one parent who said:

Yes, he should.[1]

On the other hand, five parents did not regard neat printing as a prerequisite to written communication . One parent, perhaps intuitively recognizing the role of drawing in young children's writing, articulated this position

No, not necessary. The child can draw a picture instead of printing the letters neatly.

The Chinese-Canadian parents unanimously rejected some aspects of emergent literacy. For example, all ten parents saw workbooks and basal readers as necessary in learning to read (Question 3) responding "Certainly!" and "Yes, I often bought them for her ". They all supported the practice of asking questions at the end of each story (Question 9), a practice decried by some educators (Durkin, 1978). This group unanimously rejected invented spelling (Question 19) and they often did so stridently as the following response exemplifies:

Yes, we should because it's incorrect!

[1] Verbatim responses are reported in all cases.

Previous studies (e.g. Bruneau, Rasinski and Ambrose, 1989) have found that some parents have difficulty accepting invented spelling but that many parents accept and support it. Here, there was unequivocal rejection.

Some aspects of emergent literacy were rejected by all but one parent (e.g. Question 11). In a manner reminiscent of Gough's (1976) admonition that "the good reader need not guess; the bad should not" (p.532), several parents indicate that unless the child could accurately decode every word she was "just guessing" and "he is not really reading". Perhaps informed by observing her own child's "reading like behaviour" (Holdaway, 1979), the parent who supported an emergent perspective here elaborated:

> *Not always. Usually he read the words on the page. Sometimes he could also develop his own ideas when he looked at the pictures and read..*

Similarly, only two parents believed that children do not need to copy words and texts before they begin to write on their own (Question 14). This appears consistent with the unanimous rejection ofinvented spelling in that parents saw copying texts as a means of learning correct spelling.

Euro-Canadian Parents.

Approximately 84% of the responses here were congruent with an emergent literacy perspective while individual responses ranged from 15/33 (45.5% congruency) to 32/33 (96.7% congruency). These findings are similar to those of Anderson's (1994a) study of the perceptions of literacy acquisition held by middle/ upper-middle class parents of preschoolers.

As Table 1 shows, all of these parents supported some aspects of emergent literacy. For example, all of the parents supported repeated reading of favourite books (Question 5), which Holdaway (1979) and others see as a key element in emergent reading. As one parent remarked with considerable insight, "Yes. They hear the story and the more she hears, the expression becomes stronger".

No aspect of emergent literacy was unanimously rejected by this group although they tended to have more traditional perceptions of some aspects of literacy learning. For instance, six parents supported a hierarchical model of learning to read (Question 1). However, some parents had more holistic views of learning to read as exemplified in the following the response:

I don't think so personally. I think it's more important for him to know the context of the sentence or the story. Yes, because children can skip over words and get meaning and sometimes go back afterwards.

Eight parents indicated that they would correct a child's invented spelling (Question 19). (Interestingly, all three of the parents of kindergarten children would correct invented spelling while two of the four parents of grade two children would not perhaps suggesting that parent's accept invented spelling as they see their children's writing develop). Different degrees of sensitivity to children's invented spelling were evident as the following examples demonstrate. One parent categorically stated, "Yes, I would as well as telling him that it is not good" while another parent indicated "I would definitely correct the spelling..." but "... I would do it in a non-critical way ". Several parents responded quite pragmatically as did the parent who indicated that she corrected her child's invented spelling "when my child looks up to me and asks me if it is correct". Anderson (1994a) similarly found that many parents are uncomfortable with the concept of invented spelling.

There was also considerable support for reading readiness (Question 33) within this group. And while some parents rejected reading readiness outright, several parents suggested that readiness activities are not necessary but are not harmful and thus are "okay'.

Indo-Canadian Parents.

The responses of individuals in this group ranged from 16/33 (48.5% congruent) to 25/33 (75.8% congruent) while overall, approximately 63% of the responses were congruent with an emergent literacy perspective.

As with the other groups, the parents here unanimously supported some aspects of emergent literacy, held more traditional views on some, and were divided on others. All ten parents, for example valued the role of discussion in shared reading (Question 8). One parent observed:

I would encourage child to discuss what is being read. [Discussion] increases vocabulary and child's knowledge.

In contrast, all of these parents held traditional perspectives with regards to: the role of basal readers and workbooks (Question 3), linearity in writing development (Question 15) and

invented spelling (Question 19). Interestingly, all of the Chinese-Canadian parents also held traditional perceptions about these aspects of literacy learning. Invented spelling (Question 19) was just as vigorously rejected by this as group as it was by the Chinese-Canadian parents. For example, one parent in explaining why she would correct her child's spelling of the word "cat" as "kat", emphatically argued that "c-a-t is right and k-a-t is wrong".

Nine of the parents here agreed with the use of flash cards in teaching children to read. Of course, some of the parents from the other groups in this study also supported this technique, as did the parents in the Anderson (1994a) study but to a much more limited extent.

Other considerations.

To investigate whether there was a relationship between a child's grade in school and the parent's perceptions of literacy learning, the parents were grouped according to the grade of the child. Mean scores on the **PPLLIS** were computed as follows: kindergarten 21.5, grade one 23, grade two 21.8. T tests revealed no significant differences among the three groups. Then, to see if there was a relationship between parents' previous experiences with school literacy programs and their perceptions of literacy acquisition, parents were grouped according to whether or not there was an older sibling (or siblings). Again, mean scores on the **PPLLIS** were computed with the following results : older sibling (n-17) 22.5; no older sibling (n=13) 22. T tests again indicated no significant differences.

As stated earlier, there were some commonalities across the groups; however, there were also differences. For example, when compared to the other groups, the Chinese-Canadian parents placed less value on repeated reading of favourite books (Question 6); emphasized neatness in printing (Question 13); saw copying texts as a means to learn to write (Question 14) and believed that only gifted children learn to read and write prior to formal instruction (Question 23). Comparatively, the Euro-Canadian parents tended to: express less support for basal readers and workbooks (Question 3); lend less support to asking comprehension questions after a child has read (Question 9); support a developmental view of learning to read (Question 11) and disagree that literacy learning can begin only at a particular age (Question 32). Again, the Indo-Canadian parents, for example supported the use of flashcards (Question 3) whereas the other groups showed much less support for this technique.

Open-ended question

In this section , the results for all three groups are reported first. Then similarities and differences among the three groups are highlighted. The classification scheme used here was developed by Anderson (in press).The five categories or themes capable of describing the data are: (1) Participating in activities/events, (2) Teaching literacy skills, (3) Valuing, demonstrating and encouraging literacy, (4) Knowledge development and (5) Other responses (outside the domain of literacy). These were independently sorted by an expert in early childhood education and a reliability of 95% was achieved.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Overall results

Because ten parents in each cultural group were asked to identify five things they were doing to help their children learn to read and write, a total of fifty responses for each group was anticipated. However, in each group some parents could name fewer than five items and for example, two of the Indo-Canadian parents each provided only one response and hence the discrepancy between the actual number of responses and the number of responses anticipated.

As is evident in Table 2, each group identified a wide array of items (Chinese-Canadian and Indo-Canadian parents 16 items, Euro-Canadian parents 19 items). As well, in each group, only one or two items were identified by more than one-half the parents and in many cases only one parent suggested a particular item. This finding is consistent with research in early literacy (Anderson, 1994b; Taylor, 1983) which suggests that children participate in a wide variety of literacy activities at home. Indeed, Dyson (1993) and Schmidt (1995) argue that we must not only recognize and accept the diversity in young children's home literacy experiences, we must also learn how to build on these experiences in school.

Similarities and differences

As was described earlier, the second phase of the data analysis involved the sorting of the responses from each cultural group into five themes which were capable of describing the data. Each theme is now discussed in turn .

[Insert table 3 about here]

Participating in literacy activities/events

Within this theme are literacy activities and events in which parent and child collaboratively participate. That is, the parent does not assume a didactic stance and directly teach specific skills but acts as a mediator providing the necessary amount of support for the child. A key tenet of an emergent literacy perspective is that through immersion in such literacy activities, children learn important literacy skills and attitudes (Sulzby and Teale 1991).

As can be seen in Table 3, one third of the responses of the Euro-Canadian parents and nearly one half of the responses of the Indo-Canadian parents fell into this category. That this group of Euro-Canadian parents identified a relatively large number of items in this category was to be expected since it is consistent with the findings of Anderson (in press) and with the "literate socialization" theme which is pervasive in the extant literature in emergent literacy. On the other hand, the amount of support for this conceptualization of literacy learning on the part of the Indo-Canadian parents was unexpected since previous research (Spiegel, Fitzgerald and Cunningham, 1991) with low-literate parents of blue collar occupations, as these Indo-Canadian parents were, indicates that they do not support holistic principles of literacy learning embodied in the items named here but instead, believe in traditional, skills based approaches. Similarly, that so few items in this category were identified by the high literate Chinese-Canadian parents is inconsistent with the findings of Fitzgerald, Spiegel and Cunningham (1991) who concluded that high literate parents support an emergent literacy orientation.

All ten of the Euro-Canadian parents identified "Reading to my child" as a factor in helping their children become literate, a finding consistent with the results of previous research with parents from similar backgrounds (e.g. Anderson, in press). This was the only item which all members of a particular group identified. Furthermore, this was the initial item which many of the Euro-Canadian parents proffered perhaps further suggesting the importance they place on reading to their children. Interestingly, the Indo-Canadian parents also placed considerable emphasis on shared reading with seven of the ten parents identifying it as a factor in their children's literacy development. On the other hand, only two of the Chinese-Canadian parents saw shared reading as a factor which facilitated literacy acquisition. So while other researchers (e.g. Fitzgerald, Spiegel and Cunningham, 1991; Bruneau, Rasinski and Ambrose, 1989) suggest that high literate middle class parents have perceptions of literacy learning consistent with an emergent literacy perspective,

such was not the case with the high-literate Chinese-Canadian parents here. And whereas shared reading is apparently viewed by some educators as "... the literacy event *par excellence*..." (Pellegrini, 1991, p. 380), these Chinese-Canadian parents afforded relatively little importance to it.

Teaching literacy skills

While it is generally acknowledged that parents do mediate important literacy skills within literacy events such as those discussed in the previous category (Sulzby and Teale, 1991), they do so not in a deliberate attempt to teach literacy skills but to support the child's participation in, and understanding of, the literacy events and/or activities. The items within this category, however, reflect a direct instruction or transmission-skills orientation and thus reflect the way that literacy has traditionally been taught in schools (Wells, 1986).

[Insert Table 4 about here]

As shown in table 4, some parents from all three groups identified items within this category. However, nearly 90% of the responses of the Chinese-Canadian parents fell into this category whereas relatively fewer items from the other groups fit here. For the Chinese-Canadian parents, a concern with form and with monitoring and correcting performance seemed to predominate and for example, "Teaching child to print and write properly" was the item identified most frequently (8 parents). Similarly, "Checking child's understanding of what she reads" (4 parents), "Teaching child how to spell correctly" (3 parents), and "Copying books and writing words" (2 parents) reflect the concern with form and performance. Interestingly, one of the parents also suggested that by teaching her child to "Sit at desk properly", she was helping her child learn to read and write. And while some educators might question possible relationships between posture and literacy acquisition, proper posture has traditionally been seen as essential for the development of correct printing and handwriting. In fact, the recommended resource book for the Province of British Columbia suggests that teachers "...try to instil the following posture habits." which include "feet kept flat on the floor" and "back and shoulders kept straight." (*Handwriting Resource Book Grades 1-7*, 1981, p.10).

With the Euro-Canadian parents, no trends emerged in this category in that only individual parents identified teaching spelling, phonics and so forth. Whereas the items from the Chinese-

Canadian parents suggest an overriding concern with form and performance, these items suggest a concern with teaching basic literacy skills (Adams, 1991). Anderson (in press) also found that teaching these specific skills were identified-albeit infrequently- as ways parents were contributing to their children's literacy development. Given the limited range of items suggested by the Indo-Canadian parents, it is noteworthy that three of them referred to teaching spelling. Of course, it is impossible to deduce from the available data whether these parents had difficulty accepting the concept of invented spelling. However, Anderson (1994a) and Bruneau, Rasinski and Ambrosé (1989) observed that parents who generally supported a holistic perspective of literacy learning had difficulty accepting invented spelling.

Valuing, demonstrating and encouraging literacy

While the cognitive dimensions of literacy have traditionally received much attention (e.g Dagostino and Carifio, 1994)), the socio-cultural aspects of literacy have recently gained much prominence in the literature (e.g. Schmidt, 1995). For example, researchers posit that immersion in a socio-cultural context in which literacy is valued and where literacy is a functional part of daily life contributes to children's literacy development (Sulzby and Teale, 1991). This perspective is exemplified by Smith's (1988) influential metaphor in which he likens literacy learning to joining a social club.

[Insert Table 5 about here]

Again there were marked differences among the groups in terms of this category of responses (Table 5). While nearly two thirds of all of the items produced by the Euro-Canadian parents were in this category (Table 5), each of the other groups produced relatively few responses which fit here. Interestingly, Anderson (in press) also found that the Euro-Canadian parents of preschoolers in his study believed in the importance of valuing, modelling and demonstrating literacy, and for example approximately the same percentage of them suggested that seeing a parent or significant other reading contributed to their children's literacy development. An original premise was that the open ended question which guided this study would prompt parents to identify **that which they were currently doing to help their children to become literate**. If this premise holds, it is obvious that the Euro-Canadian parents put much more stock in the importance of providing role models and encouraging children than do the parents from the other groups. Of

course, parents in each of the other groups were probably providing role models and encouraging their children in terms of literacy learning as well. Furthermore, the fact that the Chinese-Canadian parents and Indo-Canadian parents appeared not to recognize the socio-cultural dimensions of literacy may have no effect on their children's literacy development. One wonders, however how these parents view current pedagogical practices such as literacy circles and dialogue journals which are based on social-constructivist views of learning (Rogoff, 1990).

Knowledge Development

Traditionally, literacy curricula have had a skills orientation and the more mechanical aspects of reading and writing (e.g letter recognition, phonics, handwriting and printing) have received heavy emphasis. However, there is increasing recognition that reading and writing are complex processes which entail the use of various linguistic and knowledge resources (e.g. Snow, 1991). In other words, as Friere and Macedo (1987) cogently put it, literacy entails reading the world as well as reading the word.

[Insert Table 6 about here]

As shown in Table 6, neither the Chinese-Canadian parents nor the Euro-Canadian parents appeared to afford importance to the development of general knowledge in terms of their children's literacy development. On the other hand, the Indo-Canadian parents identified several factors in this category. Interestingly, two of the Indo-Canadian parents identified watching television-which some parents see as inhibiting literacy development-as a factor contributing to their children's literacy development. However, both parents elaborated that they saw television as a means for helping their children learn English which was the language of instruction at school.

Interestingly, Anderson (in press) found that the parents of preschoolers placed considerable emphasis on the role of general knowledge in their children's literacy development. Whether parents' concern with general knowledge development decreases after children commence school can only be speculated.

Other Responses

[Insert table 7 about here]

Some of the responses appeared to be outside the domain of literacy and hence were

assigned to this category (Table 7). For example, it is difficult to envision how "playing cards" facilitates literacy learning; instead this activity seems more applicable to the development of numeracy which was identified by two of the Indo-Canadian parents and also assigned to this category.

In summary, then the following trends emerged from the analysis of the parents' responses to the open-ended question:

(1). The Euro-Canadian (middle class-upper middle class) and Indo-Canadian (working class) parents appeared to afford considerable importance to the social aspects of literacy whereas the Chinese-Canadian (middle class-upper middle class) parents did not.

(2) Most of the responses of the Chinese-Canadian parents were categorized as direct teaching of literacy skills and attitudes suggesting that this group held quite traditional perceptions of literacy learning. While such direct teaching was identified by some parents in the other two groups, it received considerably less attention.

(3) The Euro-Canadian parents appeared to place much value on valuing, demonstrating and encouraging literacy whereas the other groups did not.

(4) While neither of the groups appeared to afford much value to the role of general knowledge development in literacy learning, the Indo-Canadian parents mentioned such factors more frequently then the other groups.

Conclusion

Given the lack of randomization in subject selection, obviously the results of this study cannot be generalized. Within the context of this study, it was found that parents from different cultural groups held different perceptions of literacy learning. While parents from all three cultural groups supported some aspects of emergent literacy, parents from the non-mainstream groups (Pellegrini, 1991) were less supportive of this perspective than were their mainstream counterparts. As well, each of the non-mainstream groups unanimously rejected some aspects of emergent literacy. Furthermore, it appears that even within particular cultural groups parents had varying perceptions of literacy learning.

While the results of this study need to be interpreted cautiously given the delimitation noted previously, they are interesting given that educators (e.g. Dyson, 1993; Delpit, 1992) have recently

questioned the appropriateness of accepting "generic" (Dyson, 1993) models of literacy acquisition.They argue that many of the assumptions underlying emergent literacy and whole language (e.g. risk taking, inventiveness) do not hold for different socio-cultural groups but that proponents of these perspectives and/or practices "... imply - or directly state - that certain kinds of instructional programs will benefit all children..." (Dyson, 1993, 410). Anderson (1992) found that there is a direct relationship between parents perceptions of literacy learning and the home environment they create for their children; that is parents "practice what they preach". If this holds for the parents in this study, the experiences which the Euro-Canadian parents provide match nicely the experiences that a school program with an emergent literacy orientation would provide. This would not be the case for the children from the other cultural groups.

Some researchers and theorists (e.g Fitzgerald, 1993) have suggested that when there is conflict between at literacy learning at school and literacy learning at home, children's literacy learning may be imperilled. For example, in her work with three different cultural groups in the United States, Heath (1983) found qualitative differences between the early literacy experiences of working class children and their middle class counterparts. Tracking the children's literacy development in school, she found that the middle class children whose early literacy experiences approximated the experiences which they subsequently encountered in school were successful; working class children whose preschool literacy experiences were not congruent with those at school experienced difficulty and failure and consequently dropped out of school. On the other hand, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) showed that that inner-city children in their study were successful in learning to read and write despite the lack of harmony between literacy learning at home and at school.

So, whether this apparent tension between literacy learning at home and literacy learning at school causes difficulty in children's literacy acquisition appears to be an area which needs further research. However, the results of this study suggest that we might follow Anne Dyson's advice and begin to "dialogue about difference" in terms of young children's literacy acquisition.

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Table 1 : Number of responses per group congruent with emergent literacy

Question:	*C-C	E-C	I-C
1.Does a child learn to read by first learning the letters of the alphabet and their sounds, then words, then sentences and then stories? (N)	2	4	2
2. Is teaching a child to recognize isolated words on sight (flashcards) a suitable technique for teaching her to read? (N)	6	7	2
3. Does a child need workbooks and basal readers to learn how to read? (N)	0	6	0
4. Is this book (e.g. *The Giving Tree*) suitable to read to very young children? (Y)	6	10	6
5. Does a child benefit from hearing favourite stories that she has memorized read again and again? (Y)	9	10	7
6. Should you encourage a child to join in sometimes while you read a book with which he is familiar? (Y)	5	10	8
7. Will you be teaching your child a bad habit if you point to the print as you read? (N)	8	9	10
8. Are you helping a child learn to read by encouraging her to discuss what is being read? (Y)	10	10	10
9. Is it necessary to check a child's understanding by asking him questions at the end of each story? (N)	0	7	1
10. Should you permit your child to "read" familiar books from memory using the pictures as cues?(Y)	9	10	10
11. Does real reading begin only when a child begins to say the words as they are printed on the page? (N)	1	9	4
12. Is it necessary for a child to know the letters of the alphabet, and the sounds of the letters of the alphabet, before she begins to write? (N)	1	5	3
13. Should a child learn to print neatly the letters of the alphabet before attempting to print messages, notes, stories and so forth? (N)	5	8	8
14. Is it necessary for a child to have lots of experience copying words, then sentences, and finally stories before she attempts to write on her own? (N)	2	8	7
15. Should a child be encouraged to write only easy words and short sentences when he begins to write? (N)	0	8	0
16. Are a child's early scribblings (show example) related to later development in writing stories, messages, etc.? (Y)	8	8	10
17. Does a child need workbooks like these to learn how to write? (N)	4	7	
18. Can a child begin to write before she has learned the correct spelling of the words? (Y)	7	3	6
19. Should you correct your child if she writes "kt" for the word "cat"? (N)	0	2	8
20. Is a child's confusion of "b" and "d" or "p" and "q" in printing an indication of a major problem? (N)	5	10	6
21. Can a child begin to write (e.g. notes, stories) before she knows how to read? (Y)	5	7	8
22. Are learning to read and learning to write similar to learning to talk in that children learn these skills gradually? (Y)	10	8	9
23. Is it only gifted children who learn to read and write before receiving formal instruction in preschool or elementary school? (N)	3	9	10
24. Does reading to, and with, children help them learn to write? (Y)	10	8	10
25. Do children learn important things about reading and writing before they begin formal reading programs at preschool or elementary school ? (Y)	6	9	8
Do these activities help children learn to read and to write?			
26. talking to them? (Y)	9	9	10
27. taking them on outings? (Y)	9	9	9
28. having them pretend to write grocery lists with you? (Y)	9	9	10
29. reading to them? (Y)	10	10	10
30. Should schools be totally responsible for teaching children to learn to read and to write? (N)	6	8	0
31. Is it important that children see their parents reading and writing? (Y)	9	10	7
32. Should children have reached a certain age before they can begin to learn to read and write? (N)	1	9	4
33. Do children need training in hand-eye coordination, recognizing shapes, and forth before they begin to learn to read and to write? (N)	5	5	3

*C-C = Chinese Canadian; E-C = Euro Canadian; I-C = Indo-Canadian

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Table 2: What are the five most important things which you are doing to help your child learn to read and to write?

Chinese-Canadian Parents		
Teaching child to print and write properly		8
Checking child's understanding of what she reads		4
Teaching child how to spell correctly		3
Reading to child		2
Having child recite story she has read		2
Making sure child concentrates while reading and writing		2
Teaching him how to write		2
Copying books and writing words		2
Ensuring child pronounces words clearly when reading		1
Sit at desk properly		1
Helping him understand the use of learning to read and write		1
Teaching child to read fast and correctly		1
Making sure child completes homework		1
Correcting errors in grammar		1
Teaching him how to listen		1
Speaking the mother tongue [Mandarin] well		1
	Total	33
Euro-Canadian Parents		
Reading to my child		10
Child sees parents or significant others reading		6
Providing books on a regular basis		3
Encouraging child with reading and writing		3
Going to books to look up information		2
Making sure that reading is seen as pleasurable		2
Pointing to pictures during reading		1
Providing pencils, pens and paper		1
Encouraging my child to use the computer		1
Teaching my child how to spell		1
I started him in early literacy [phonics based] program		1
Child reading to parents		1
Child writes stories which I encourage		1
Teaching pronunciation and phonics		1
My child taught himself		1
Restricting the amount of television viewing		1
Teaching my child the alphabet		1
Showing that reading has practical application		1
The computer helped because it required her to read		1
	TOTAL	39
Indo-Canadian Parents		
Reading to my child		7
Listening to my child reading/telling stories		3
Teaching my child spelling		3
Teaching him numbers		2
Answering my child's questions		2
Watching television helps him [learn English]		2
Bringing books from store for her		1
Taking my child on outings		1
Correcting her pronunciation of difficult words		1
Telling him the meaning of vocabulary words when he reads		1
Looking at flyers from the supermarket with him		1
Playing cards with him		1
I bought her a computer game		1
Helping him write letters to his friends and grandma in India		1
Telling her stories		1
Printing lines for him to write on		1
	TOTAL	29

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Table 3: Participating in literacy activities/events

Chinese-Canadian Parents			
Reading to child		2	
	TOTAL	2	(6%)
Euro-Canadian Parents			
Reading to my child		10	
Going to books to look up information		2	
Child reading to parents		1	
	TOTAL	13	(33%)
Indo-Canadian			
Reading to my child		7	
Listening to my child reading/telling stories		3	
Looking at flyers from the supermarket with him		1	
Helping him write letters to his friends and grandma in India		1	
Telling him stories		1	
	TOTAL	13	(45%)

Table 4: Teaching literacy skills

Chinese-Canadian Parents			
Teaching child to print and write properly		8	
Checking child's understanding of what she reads		4	
Teaching child how to spell correctly		3	
Having child recite story she has read		2	
Making sure child concentrates while reading and writing		2	
Teaching him how to write		2	
Copying books and writing words		2	
Ensuring child pronounces words clearly when reading		1	
Sit at desk properly		1	
Teaching child to read fast and correctly		1	
Making sure child completes homework		1	
Correcting errors in grammar		1	
Teaching him how to listen		1	
	TOTAL	29	(88%)
Euro-Canadian			
Teaching my child how to spell		1	
I started him in early literacy [phonics based] program		1	
Teaching pronunciation and phonics		1	
Teaching my child the alphabet		1	
The computer helped since it required her to read			1
	TOTAL	5	(13%)
Indo-Canadian			
Teaching my child spelling		3	
Correcting her pronunciation of difficult words		1	
Telling him the meanings of vocabulary words when he reads		1	
Printing lines for him to write on		1	
	TOTAL	6	(21%)

Table 5: Valuing, demonstrating and encouraging literacy

Chinese-Canadian Parents			
Helping him understand the uses of learning to read and write		1	
	TOTAL	1	(3%)
Euro-Canadian Parents			
Child sees parents or significant others reading		6	
Encouraging child with reading and writing		3	
Providing books on a regular basis		3	
Making sure that reading is seen as pleasurable		2	
Providing pencils, pen and paper		1	
Encouraging my child to use the computer		1	
Child writes stories which I encourage		1	
Showing that reading has practical application		1	
	TOTAL	18	(62%)
Indo-Canadian Parents			
Bringing books from store for her		1	
I bought her a computer game		1	
	TOTAL	2	(7%)

Table 6: Knowledge development

Chinese-Canadian Parents			
Speaking the mother tongue well		1	
	TOTAL	1	(3%)
Euro-Canadian Parents			
Pointing to pictures during reading		1	
	TOTAL	1	(2.6%)
Indo-Canadian Parents			
Answering my child's questions		2	
Watching television helps him [learn English]		2	
Taking my child on outings		1	
	TOTAL	5	(17%)

Table 7: Other Responses

Euro-Canadian Parents			
My child taught himself		1	
Restricting the amount of television viewing		1	
	TOTAL	2	(5%)
Indo-Canadian Parents			
Teaching him numbers		2	
Playing cards with him		1	
	TOTAL	3	(10%)